



# Echoes of Anger: Social Media Responses to Increasing Violence in Myanmar

## Social Media Watch

To support humanitarian work in Myanmar, [Insecurity Insight](#) has carried out social media monitoring to understand perceptions and key concerns around the aid response and health care workers, with the aim of contributing to the development of aid agencies' communication and security risk management strategies in response to community sentiment.

### Summary

This brief provides an analysis of sentiments expressed in 2,106 public comments in response to 13 Facebook posts published by news sources on social media in Myanmar between June and October 2024. It offers a unique insight into public reactions, the emotional responses to events of those posting the comments, and perspectives on key humanitarian issues.

The 13 Facebook posts covered events involving:

- **humanitarian blockades and resource restrictions**
- **the targeting of international and local NGOs and health care workers; and**
- **looting by armed actors.**

The comments included opinions relevant to an acceptance-based security risk management strategy in the form of opinions related to aid workers or aid groups (6 comments) and blockades (237 comments). Overall, the social media space in Myanmar was highly polarised in the period that was studied, with most comments containing strong opinions rather than references to neutral facts.

#### **Criticism of military actions against aid workers or aid groups was common:**

- The analysis highlights that most criticisms of military actions against NGOs and aid workers were rooted in strong personal anger. Explicit references to international humanitarian law or related legal frameworks were rare, but were present in some posts.
- Criticism of aid workers or aid groups was not commonly voiced in response to these 13 posts, but social media users were not convinced that aid agencies remained neutral, and several posts alleged that they were involved in smuggling of some kind.
- Military blockades elicited mainly negative comments and included nuances such as criticism of their humanitarian impact on health care and aid, frustration over the economic consequences of blockades like disrupted trade and shortages of supplies, and general condemnation of the military's tactics.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Comments also included insights on other key concerns:**

- **Protection and accountability concerns:** Several comments highlighted the need to safeguard humanitarian operations and uphold human rights, reflecting public expectations of accountability in conflict-affected areas.
- **Criticism of the media:** Some comments criticised perceived media bias or misinformation, which may affect public trust and influence the narrative around aid efforts.
- **Hate speech and ethnic hostility:** Evidence of hate speech and ethnic hostility in comments underscores the need for aid agencies to incorporate protection obligations.
- **Sentiment towards China:** A strong negative attitude towards China was evident, often linked to its perceived role in the conflict. Understanding these sentiments is critical for security risk management processes and navigating local dynamics to ensure effective aid delivery.

## Context

Social media reactions to information related to aid agencies reported by edited media via Facebook posts highlighted the multifaceted crises in Myanmar with implications for the aid sector. These reactions are analysed in this brief.

In 2024, the Myanmar military experienced unprecedented setbacks, including the loss of control over most border crossing points with China and key trade routes with neighbouring countries. The Three Brotherhood Alliance, which has historically been supported by China, seized control of large swathes of the Shan hills and nearly all of Rakhine [state](#). Another key statistic was that the number of people displaced by the conflict surpassed 3 million by [May 2024](#).

Some of the information shared in posts highlighted the escalating humanitarian crises in the country. This included posts from October 2024 with content related to the military imposing strict entry bans in Kalay, Sagaing region, which prevented ambulances from transporting patients from Tamu to health care facilities. Posts also included information related to China-imposed restrictions on essential imports at the Muse border crossing, exacerbating shortages caused by the Myanmar military's ongoing restrictions imposed in conflict areas. Other information discussed on social media in July related to the collapse of health care access in Lashio, Northern Shan state, as clashes between the military and ethnic armed groups forced the closure of hospitals and clinics, and the evacuation of NGO and aid organisation workers and facilities. Meanwhile, chronic medicine shortages due to transport blockades left patients in Rakhine state unable to access life-saving medications. These incidents occurred against the backdrop of intensified conflict, as the military government faced territorial losses and economic decline. The analysis that follows is based on comments posted in response to these events. The high level of negative sentiment reflects a context of ongoing conflict with profound humanitarian impacts coupled with an inadequate aid response from the international community.

## The data at a glance

The analysis is based on 13 posts about aid-related content that edited media outlets had shared via Facebook and that generated 2,106 comments by social media users in which they discussed the posted content. In these comments, users expressed polarised opinions on governance, blockades, and the role of non-state armed groups and NGOs.

For the purposes of this analysis, comments and posts were categorised as follows:

- negative (against an aid group, NGO, health care site or health care workers) if a comment directly criticised these subjects:
  - **6 comments** fell into this category;
- negative (against blockades) if a comment directly critiqued the establishment of a blockade or checkpoint controlling the free movement of people and goods (including medicines, ambulances, aid workers, and humanitarian aid):
  - **237 comments** fell into this category, most of which referred to the Myanmar military;

- negative (against the media) if a comment critiqued or expressed distrust in the media in general or the edited media platform that published the content:
  - **17 comments** fell into this category;
- negative (against the military or an armed group) if a post critiqued the military or an armed group for injuring, killing, or arresting an aid or health care worker:
  - **96 comments** fell into this category;
- neutral if a post provided factual information or asked a question in a neutral tone:
  - **31 comments** fell into this category;
- political opinion if a comment provided a political opinion about a geopolitical or domestic concern (these were further sorted depending on the subject of the political opinion, e.g. China, the conflict, the use of natural resources, etc.):
  - **1,618 comments** fell into this category, which included general discussions (519), criticisms of China (990), calls to shut down the Sino-Myanmar oil and natural gas pipelines (101), pro-China comments (2), and updates on the armed conflict (6);
- ethnic hate if a post used hate speech against another group:
  - **24 comments** fell into this category;
- not applicable if a post could not be categorised due to technical constraints on the analytical process:<sup>2</sup>
  - **77 comments** fell into this category.

No posts or comments were found to express positive sentiments in this analysis.

The social media space in Myanmar is highly polarised. In this sample, only 1.46% of comments classified as neutral were truly neutral (because they presented objective facts or posed questions rather than expressed opinions). By contrast, over a six-month period of monitoring, social media posts and comments on similar topics in three Sahel countries ([Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#), and [Niger](#)) expressed neutral sentiments in between 40% and 70% of the total number of comments.

## Sentiment analysis

### Public sentiment expressed on social media towards aid agencies, aid workers and health care workers

Understanding public sentiment toward aid agencies is essential if they are to operate effectively, protect their staff and beneficiaries, ensure their access to populations in need, and maintain their acceptance in conflict-affected contexts. Analysis of the comments focused on in this brief highlights scepticism toward NGOs, with key themes reflecting concerns about neutrality, distrust, and localised frustrations:

- **Scepticism about NGO neutrality:**

*"Some charity organisations are collaborating with the SAC."*

*"Most charity groups are forced to work under SAC influence."*

- These comments suggest a perception that some NGOs may lack neutrality by collaborating with the State Administration Council (SAC), which is Myanmar's ruling military junta. Such allegations can undermine trust in humanitarian organisations and demonstrate a lack of understanding of humanitarian principles.

- **Misuse of resources:**

*"Even Pyusawhti use charity vehicles to smuggle goods."*

*"Most charity groups are forced to work under SAC influence ... and use charity vehicles to smuggle goods."*

These comments accuse Pyusawhti, a pro-junta militia, and the SAC of exploiting charity resources for illicit activities such as smuggling. This reflects concerns that the military and armed groups may co-opt aid vehicles and resources, undermining people's trust that they are being used for their intended purposes and risking the safety of aid workers. This is a recurring theme in posts and comments.

- **Expectations, cynicism, and frustration directed at the aid sector and international community:**

Several social media users called on international rights or aid organisations to support them:

*"Restricting medicines and health care is a violation of human rights. Rights organisations, speak up!"*

*"The collaboration between Myanmar's military and China shows utter disregard for humanity. The international community must act."*

- **Other comments expressed frustration at the inability of the aid sector to achieve tangible results:**

*"Even ICRC can't do anything."*

This statement expresses expectations of and hope for international assistance, as well as cynicism towards the aid sector and frustration that even the most powerful aid agencies are unable to address concerns caused by the crisis.

## **Anger towards the Myanmar military**

A total of **96 comments (in response to 5 posts)** criticised the Myanmar military for killing or arresting aid workers, often framing these actions as cowardly and emblematic of weak leadership.

Some social media users identified specific risks that aid agencies should consider when operating in areas controlled by the Myanmar military:

- **Arrests for offering condolences:** One comment stated, *“They arrested someone just for offering condolences. Arresting for no reason shows their weak mindset.”*
- **Arbitrary arrests:** Comments like *“This SAC lacks the intelligence to govern. Their arbitrary arrests are turning the entire country into a giant prison”* and *“Do what you want, but don’t target those helping with charity, health, funerals, or natural disasters”* highlight the anger and frustration at the military’s actions targeting aid workers and humanitarian efforts.

The dominant sentiments were those of **anger, frustration, and fear** directed at the military, with social media users using terms such as *“cowards”*, *“weakest leaders in history”*, *“shameful”*, and *“brutal”*. This anger often expanded to compare the military to “IS<sup>3</sup> or the Taliban” or described the military as *“uncivilised”* and *“thieves”*.

Other comments highlighted the humanitarian cost of the military’s actions: *“If you kill those helping with aid, what hope is there?”* and *“Killing charity organisations is beyond extreme”*. These comments reflect the public’s perception of the military’s inhumanity and its detrimental impact on efforts to alleviate suffering. Additionally, many comments expressed hopelessness and disillusionment, emphasising that the situation has created a climate of fear and instability in which both aid workers and civilians suffer profound consequences.

## Public sentiment on social media towards blockades

- **Blockade initiated by the military or other armed groups**

Blockades emerged as a recurring theme in **6** of the analysed posts, resulting in **237 comments** criticising their humanitarian impact, of which only 7 criticised the impact of the blockade imposed by China, compared to blockades imposed by the Myanmar military, which faced significant condemnation.

Blockades and restrictions imposed by the military junta have significantly impacted access to critical goods, particularly medical supplies and food. One [post](#) documented the blockade enforced by the military in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine state, which imposed strict limitations on the sale and transport of essential medical supplies like gauze, bandages, and medical alcohol, leaving patients in need of care at risk of severe health complications. Similarly, other [blockades in Mogok and Mandalay](#) resulted in the confiscation of goods at checkpoints – including basic food supplies and medicines.

Social media comments in response to these blockades highlighted widespread frustration and anger. Many comments criticised the military’s actions as deliberately punitive and harmful to civilians, with remarks such as *“The military, which claims to work for the people, is now causing the people to starve”* and *“Blocking medicine is too much. We should block their supplies too”*. These sentiments reflect a profound disillusionment with the military’s governance, with people identifying the restrictions imposed by the military as tools of repression rather than actions to ensure security. Some comments also called for support from the international community, such as *“Restricting medicines and health care is a violation of human rights. Rights organisations, speak up!”*

- **Blockade initiated by China**

China's blockade of imports at border checkpoints in Muse and other locations in northern Shan state, which was imposed on 22 [October 2024](#), had significant repercussions. The Chinese authorities restricted the transport of goods such as electronics, household items, machinery, and medical supplies, allowing only limited personal items like food and clothing to move through the blockade. Merchants in Muse reported that strict inspections resulted in seizures of unauthorised goods and bans on transport for up to four years.

One post regarding this **China-initiated border blockade** stood out, generating **1,672 comments**. This was the largest engagement across all posts, becoming a platform for expressing geopolitical frustrations and domestic grievances. A total of **990 comments in response to this post criticised China's influence in Myanmar and welcomed the blockade**. The heightened focus on this post underscores the public's sensitivity and negative sentiment towards topics involving China's influence.

## Evidence of hate speech in social media comments

Hate speech continues to be shared via Facebook in Myanmar. In response to the 13 posts analysed, **24 comments** contained hate speech or ethnic hostility, mainly directed at the Chinese and to some extent the Bamar/Burmese ethnic group, which is associated with the military junta. In Myanmar, such rhetoric has historically played a role in justifying organised violence, as seen with the persecution of the Rohingya. According to assessments, the majority of content violating Facebook's content standards by expressing hate speech continued to remain live on the platform, in part due to the lack of resources for non-English content [moderation](#).

- **Hate speech towards China and Chinese people**

Some of the analysed comments revealed deeply rooted resentment toward China and Chinese nationals, characterised by dehumanising language and calls for their expulsion or violence towards them. Examples include the following:

- **Dehumanisation and insults:** Comments like *“the Chinese mentality is inherently inferior”* and *“Let them sink, those dogs”* use derogatory stereotypes to reduce individuals to dehumanising caricatures, reinforcing hostility and exacerbating negative perceptions.
- **Blaming China for societal problems:** Statements such as *“Don't import anything from them; their products are all fake, full of the COVID virus”* illustrate a trend of attributing health crises and economic challenges to Chinese influence, fostering scapegoating and division.
- **Calls for expulsion and violence:** Alarming rhetoric, including, for example, *“Deport Chinese nationals; genocide if needed”* and *“Expel Chinese nationals who can't speak Burmese”*, escalates resentment into explicit advocacy for exclusion or harm, reflecting how unchecked hate speech can normalise violent solutions.
- **Moral superiority:** Comments such as *“Being neighbours with China is terrible – their ethics are so low”* frame Chinese people as inherently immoral, deepening social divisions and perpetuating stereotypes.

- **Hate speech toward the Myanmar military**

**Four** comments containing hate speech directed at the Myanmar military (which is primarily composed of the Bamar/Burmese ethnic group) were also detected. These comments consistently used derogatory language, with the term “**dogs**” recurring:

*“The dogs think they’ll sit on the throne forever.”*

*“Dogs only know how to do these things.”*

*“Eradicate every last one of the vile and despicable dogs without leaving a single one behind.”*

While these remarks reflect widespread anger rooted in the military’s war crimes and oppressive actions, language of this kind still constitutes hate speech. It risks perpetuating cycles of violence by dehumanising military personnel and normalising violent retaliation, making efforts to discuss or focus on peace, truth, and reconciliation challenging.

- **Graphic descriptions of violence**

In some cases, comments, although not explicitly hate speech, transmitted testimonies of atrocities committed by the military. For example:

*“If heads are cut off, it’s certain. If not, only the creatures you’ve raised could be this cruel. In the villages entered by the monstrous military columns, they behead villagers and hang their heads on fences. The so-called ‘blood drinkers’ also exist. When they kill people, they always torture them in ways that separate the head from the body. In military intelligence, they use unimaginably brutal methods: pouring boiling water, pouring acid, pulling out teeth and nails, breaking bones one by one, gouging out eyes, driving metal into flesh. They have every kind of vile technique unimaginable to ordinary people. On top of that, they also have a disgusting habit of shifting blame to shameless accomplices.”<sup>4</sup>*

This type of content underscores the significant failure of proper content moderation. However, while such graphic posts violate platform guidelines, they also serve as vital testimonies documenting war crimes and human rights abuses. Social media platforms must strike a balance between removing harmful content and preserving critical evidence of atrocities to assist with accountability and advocacy efforts.

By understanding the dynamics of online hate speech and the failure of content moderation, aid agencies and civil society can better navigate the challenges of operating in Myanmar while safeguarding their teams and the communities they serve.

### **Implications of hate speech for aid agencies and civil society**

1. **Safety risks:** Aid agencies working in Myanmar face heightened risks because hate speech fosters violence and potentially directly targets vulnerable communities. This can restrict humanitarian access and endanger staff.
2. **Community engagement:** Programmes addressing social cohesion must actively counteract such divisive rhetoric. Promoting inclusive dialogue is essential to reduce tensions and foster peacebuilding.
3. **Operational neutrality:** Ensuring the neutrality of aid operations is critical to avoiding accusations of bias, especially in regions where ethnic and geopolitical tensions run high. This includes recognising the complex social dynamics underpinning hate speech and addressing its root causes.

- **Accountability towards impacted populations**

A total of **17 comments** criticised media outlets reporting on blockades and arrests of aid workers, accusing these outlets of dishonesty, withholding information, or failing to name military perpetrators due to fear of retribution. These criticisms reflect an increasingly polarised media landscape in Myanmar, where mistrust of journalism has grown as media organisations attempt to navigate a complex environment of censorship and self-censorship as a result of the military government's [repression](#). For aid agencies, this fraught media landscape poses significant challenges, because misinformation and mistrust can influence public perceptions of their operations and impact humanitarian access.

- **Accusations of dishonesty or bias:** Comments like *“The media are skilled at covering up intimidation”* and *“The media are too eager to accuse the military”* reflect scepticism toward both the accuracy and objectivity of media reporting.
- **Demands for clarity and accountability:** Comments such as *“Your news is unclear; are you blaming the SAC or saying that PDFs<sup>5</sup> control the area?”* and *“The reporting lacks clarity on who is responsible”* highlight concerns about ambiguous reporting and the failure to attribute violence accurately.
- **Allegations of fear or manipulation:** Statements like *“The media won’t call it PDFs because they fear a backlash”* and *“The media are twisting things to blame the SAC”* suggest that social media audiences believe that media outlets are either complicit in propaganda or hesitant to report the full truth.
- **Distrust and rejection of narratives:** Comments such as *“Stop spreading fabricated propaganda”* and *“Why can’t they write the truth?”* underscore the dismissive attitude some commenters have toward media credibility.

Some comments also challenged the prioritisation of news topics, such as *“Share news about aid efforts instead of these trivial things. Help those struggling to eat”*, reflecting a desire for practical and constructive reporting rather than contentious political narratives.

While much of this commentary reveals distrust, it is crucial to recognise its underlying message: the need for transparency in reporting whether by edited media or aid agencies. Media outlets and aid agencies operating in Myanmar must focus on factual, unbiased communications while ensuring that the reports they issue consider the safety and dignity of impacted populations. Furthermore, constructive feedback, such as calls to highlight aid efforts, should be integrated into communication strategies to foster trust and demonstrate accountability to those most affected by the ongoing crisis.

***“Restricting medicines and health care is a violation of human rights. Rights organisations, speak up!”***



## Recommendations to enhance the aid sector's reputation and communicate humanitarian principles

### Enhance transparency and accountability.

- Explain humanitarian values and principles.
- Publish regular updates on aid activities, including clear reporting on how resources are allocated and distributed.
- Proactively address misinformation or accusations of bias by engaging with local communities through trusted channels.

### Strengthen community engagement.

- Develop targeted communication strategies to address public concerns, including scepticism about neutrality and transparency in aid operations.
- Use accessible and culturally appropriate formats to explain humanitarian principles and operations, emphasising neutrality and impartiality in local languages.

### Monitor and counter hate speech.

- Collaborate with social media platforms to improve content moderation.
- Social media should be continuously monitored for negative sentiments and misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech (MDH) targeting aid-related organisations. These organisations should develop and deploy MDH mitigation strategies, such as training staff in digital literacy and risk management, to safeguard against potential security threats and ensure the safety of staff and the efficacy of aid operations.

### Address media criticism by encouraging and supporting constructive dialogue.

- Work with journalists and media outlets to improve the accuracy of reporting on humanitarian efforts by providing clear and factual information about aid activities.
- Offer media training or resources to journalists covering humanitarian crises to build understanding of international humanitarian law and its principles.

### Advocate for policy and legal protections.

- Engage with governments and local actors to address structural challenges such as access restrictions and resource blockades that hinder humanitarian operations.
- Hold social media platforms accountable for failing to properly fund and staff automated detection programmes, media literacy programmes, internal content moderators, and local third-party fact checkers.

## What does Insecurity Insight analyse on social media?

The main components of public social media data are *posts and comments*. A post refers to the uploading of fresh content by a user account or page that would appear both on the account or page “wall” and followers’ timelines.

A *comment* is different from a post and refers to a social media user’s *reply or response* to a post in the form of a comment that appears in the commentary section of the social media platform. In addition to posts and comments, social media data also includes various *types of user engagement* with posts and comments, such as in the form of “likes” and “shares”.

Some organisations, including *edited media outlets, NGOs, local authorities, political actors* and others, participate on social media by uploading posts or publishing comments for a variety of purposes, including to disseminate information.

Private social media channels (including WhatsApp) and content (including private Facebook groups) are excluded from this public social media sentiment analysis due to their closed nature and restricted access. This limitation means that private conversations could potentially reflect sentiments that differ from or deepen those expressed on more open forums.

## Limitations

The sample size for analysis had to be limited because sentiment classification had to be carried out individually and manually for each post and comment rather than through a process of algorithmically generated sentiment analysis. This manual classification process was necessary because automated tools often misclassify content, such as labelling neutral statements like “humanitarian aid is important” or “conflict is worsening the situation on the ground” as negative, even when the sentiment is not critical of the aid response.

The analysis was based on a limited sample of posts and comments, which provides a snapshot of social media discourse, but is not representative of the full range of public sentiment across Myanmar. Moreover, while translations were conducted to the best of our ability using available tools, subtle nuances in language, tone and cultural context might not have been fully captured. Despite these limitations, this method offers unique insights that automated tools cannot provide. By manually categorising sentiments, we can capture nuances in public discourse that are often missed, particularly in regions or countries with complex sociopolitical dynamics like Myanmar.

**Should you wish to provide us with any feedback or to get in touch, kindly write to: [info@insecurityinsight.org](mailto:info@insecurityinsight.org)**

## Endnotes

- 1 This brief uses the terms “Myanmar military” or “military” in reference to the Myanmar armed forces, which are known as the Tatmadaw
- 2 Such as if translation software was unable to translate a post/comment, or if a comment could not be downloaded.
- 3 The non-state group known as Islamic State.
- 4 Original comment: ခေါင်းဖက်ရင် သချောပီ စခမဟုတ်ရင် ဒင်းတို့မွေးထားတဲ့ကောင်တွေပဲအဲဒီလောက်ရက်စက်တာ အဲဒီကောင်တွေပဲရှိတယ်ဘီလူးစစ်ကင်းရေးအဖွဲ့ဝင်သွားတဲ့ရွာတွေမှာဆို ရွာသားတွေကိုခေါင်းဖက်ပီပြီ ခံစားရဦးတော့မှာ စွပ်ထားတာသွေးသောက်ဆိုတဲ့ကောင်တွေလည်း လူသတ်ရင် ခေါင်းတခါး ကိုယ်တခါးဖက်အောင် အမဲနှိပ်စက်သတ်တာစစ်ကင်းရေးမှာ ရနေပေးပါ အကဲစစ်လင်းတာ၊ သွားတွေ လက်သည်းတွေဆွဲနှုတ်တာ၊ အရိုးတွေတစ်ချောင်းချင်းချိုးတာ၊ မျက်လုံးဖောက်၊ အသားထဲသံရှိက်သင်း စတဲ့သာမန်လူ တွေးတောင်မတွေးနိုင်လောက်တဲ့ ယုတ်မာတဲ့နည်းလမ်းတွေ သူတို့မှာအစုံရှိတယ်ပဲ၊ အရှက်မရှိသူများကိုလွဲချွတ်တဲ့စောက်ကျင့်လည်းရှိတယ်
- 5 People’s Defence Forces.
- 6 Such as if translation software was unable to translate a post/comment, or if a comment could not be downloaded.

## Other resources

### The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) 418 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care in Myanmar in 2023, compared to 280 in 2022.

In these incidents, 37 health workers were killed; health facilities were damaged or destroyed, and occupied. In addition, 102 health workers were arrested and 37 were killed. Health worker kidnappings quadrupled, while a similar number of health workers were arrested and killed between 2022 and 2023. Health workers were threatened and harassed by conflict parties, including being warned by resistance fighters that they must join the CDM, while facing the risk of being targeted with violence or arrested by the Myanmar armed forces for doing so. Cases of health facilities being occupied by the Myanmar military, militia, and other allies more than tripled in 2023 compared to 2022. Most involved the Myanmar armed forces using health facilities as bunkers or bases for military operations. These occupations were most frequent in Sagaing region, but were dispersed across 12 other areas. Opposition forces increasingly used drones armed with explosives to attack Myanmar armed forces occupying health facilities.



SHCC Factsheets: Burmese: [2023](#). English: [2023](#); [2022](#); [2021](#); [2020](#).

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